



A Listening and Speaking Lesson Design for EFL Undergraduates in China

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Abstract

Freshmen and sophomores in universities of China usually have Listening and Speaking class once every week. The paper conducts a critical review of one of the popular listening and speaking textbooks in China, New College English Listening and Speaking Course Book I, and designed a two-period listening and speaking lesson for freshmen of universities which have chosen this book as the textbook by taking full use of the teaching material and taking the modern listening and speaking teaching theories into consideration.

1. Introduction

Freshmen and sophomores in universities of China usually have Listening and Speaking class once every week, two periods each time, 50 minutes each period each semester. There is a variety of listening and speaking course books for universities to choose and New College English Listening and Speaking Course Book is among the most popular ones. The paper is aimed to give a critical review of the textbook and propose a relatively effective listening and speaking lesson by taking full use of the teaching material and taking the modern listening and speaking teaching theory into consideration.

The students in universities usually come from many different provinces of China. They are all adult learners, aged from 18 to 20. The majority of the students have sufficient grammatical knowledge of English and intermediate-level ability in English listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, they vary in English proficiency, and their vocabulary is usually limited and many of them are poor in English speaking. Most of them acknowledge the importance of English, since many employers take students' English level into consideration when selecting employees in China in recent years. A minority of the students like to study English for its own sake, while the rest study it mainly due to its practical value as mentioned above.

2. Analysis of the Teaching Materials

2.1 Introduction to the Course Book

The book to be used in the lesson is entitled "New College English Listening and Speaking Course Book" (with multi-media teaching disks). Book I is designed for Non-English freshmen. It is composed based on the concepts of Autonomous Learning and Individualized Teaching and aims to enhance students' ability in listening and speaking to such a degree that they could communicate with English speakers effectively in their future work and life. It emphasizes on cultivating students' abilities in understanding text-level listening materials and expressing themselves clearly via different kinds of listening and speaking tasks and activities.

It consists of 16 units, centered on a certain topic, composed of 4 parts, namely, Part A, Part B, Part C and Part D. Part A has two exercises, Communicative Function and Listening Strategy; Part B is divided into three parts: Pre-listening Tasks, Listening Tasks and Speaking Tasks; Part C is named Additional Listening and Part D is entitled Home Listening.

2.2. Critique of the Course Book

The advantages of this book are that topics of each unit are relevant to students' life and hence engaging and helpful for students' future development; communicative function of language is highlighted and illustrated; listening strategies are incorporated and practiced. Besides, suggested teaching plan, cultural notes and tape script are provided in Teacher's Book, which gives teachers a lot of assistance in lesson preparation; Multi-media teaching disk is also available for both teachers and students, which allows students to have further self-study due to individual difference; A movie clip is included in each unit in the disk, which entertains students and motivates them to study English with fun; Various listening and speaking materials and activities are given in the book and more in the

disk, which enables teachers to select and adapt materials to suit their particular context. The weakness of this book is mainly concerned with the design of the activities. Teachers need to think of more engaging and closer-to-real-life activities to get students more involved and better prepare them for future contact with English speakers. More cultural information should also be added in class to broaden students' horizon and reduce their possible cultural shock. On the whole, the strength of this course book outweighs its weakness.

3. Lesson Design and Critique

3.1. Lesson Plan

Objectives: Students will be able to greet others and introduce one to another in English properly.

Students will be able to understand speaking with incomplete plosion and pronounce properly when incomplete plosion is involved.

Students will be able to use strategy of listening for gist initially and strategy of listening for details later on.

Students will be able to list more ways to improve their English proficiency.

Step	Time	Activities	Rationale
PRE-ACTIVITY			
1 Communicative Function—Greetings and Introduction	20 min.	1) Ss read Useful Expressions. 2) Ss listen to dialogues one by one twice, and do blank-filling exercises, and then T checks. 3) Ss do pair-discussion on the styles of dialogues (formal/informal); Ss give individual report and then T summarizes. 4) Ss do Role-Play. (Three Ss a group: A B C, A knows both B and C; B and C don't know each other; A introduces B to C)	Input theory Metacognitive Strategy—selective attention: listen for details Fluncy; Speaking skills: Speech function skills—greet people and make introduction
2 Listening Strategy — Incomplete Plosion	5 min.	1) Ss listen and repeat. 2) Ss do pair-discussion on the linguistic features; Ss give individual report and then T summarizes. 3) Ss imitate the speakers in the recording.	Systemic: knowledge of the language system; Fluency Speaking skills: Phonological skills; Automaticity theory
3 Group Discussion	15 min.	1) Ss read Useful Expressions first. 2) Pair-discussion on questions related to English study. Individual report. T summarizes.	Pre-speaking support: providing vocabulary input Fluency: Information gap Fluency: Social monologue
MAIN ACTIVITY			
1 Listening—Talking about Studying English	25 min.	Exercise One (10 min.) 1) T introduces the topic of the listening materials to Ss. 2) Ss read vocabulary in Word Bank and then T checks. 3) Ss scan questions first.	Activating schema Input theory

		<p>4) Ss answer two multiple choice questions for the 1st listening and then T checks. Exercise Two (15 min.) Ss listen for two more times to do Blank-filling exercises.</p> <p>2) Group-discussion for the right answers</p> <p>3) T checks and corrects Ss' mistakes where necessary</p>	<p>Metacognitive Strategy—selective attention: listen for gist</p> <p>Metacognitive Strategy—selective attention: listen for details</p> <p>Cooperative Learning; Fluency</p>
POST ACTIVITY			
1 Group-discussion	15 min.	<p>1) T gives Ss instruction for group brain-storming.</p> <p>2) Ss do brain-storming in groups and collect suggestions for the speakers in the listening materials.</p> <p>3) Ss' individual report.</p>	<p>Task-based Language Teaching; Fluency: Problem-solving & Social monologue; Cooperative Learning</p>
2 Imitation	5 min.	<p>1) T asks Ss to listen and repeat after the speakers, and draws their attention to speakers' intonation, tone and stress.</p> <p>2) Ss listen and repeat.</p>	Automaticity Theory
3 Listening—How to Improve Listening Comprehension	15 min.	<p>1) T introduces the topic to Ss.</p> <p>2) Ss listen for general idea for the first listening under the guidance of three content questions, and then T checks.</p> <p>3) Ss listen for two more times for details and finish blank-filling exercises.</p>	<p>Activating schema</p> <p>Metacognitive Strategy—selective attention: listen for gist</p> <p>Metacognitive Strategy—selective attention: listen for details</p>
Closure			
Extension task	No limit	Students finish Part D, Home Listening Exercise—English Pronunciation themselves after class	Metacognitive Strategy—selective attention: listen for gist & details respectively

3.2. Critique of the Lesson

In this lesson plan, listening and speaking activities, two indispensable parts of communication, are woven together. Through the whole lesson, several principles are taken into consideration, such as theories of Schema, Comprehensible Input, Strategies in the design of listening activities and theories of Fluency, Speaking as a Skill, Cooperative Learning, Automaticity and Task-Based Language Teaching in the design of speaking activities.

In all the three parts, pre-activity, main activity and post activity, there are listening activities. At the beginning of each listening activity, each speaking activity as well, the writer plans to give students a brief introduction to what they are going to do, which could activate students' schema, the background knowledge, crucial for students to build up a mental model or an overall interpretation (Anderson & Lynch, 1988). The writer asks students to read Useful Expressions in Communicative Function and vocabulary in Word Bank before students listen in both pre-activity and main activity, which could facilitate students' listening and promote students' acquisition of English language since those expressions and vocabulary guarantee that the listening material is comprehensible input to students (Krashen, 1985). In the listening activities in both Main Activity and Post Activity, the writer tries to raise students' awareness of using listening strategies, the mental mechanisms used to process and manage information, and train their ability in using an important metacognitive strategy — selective



attention by asking them to listen for the general idea for the first time of listening and details for the second and third listening (Christine C.M. Gob, 2002).

Similar to listening activities, speaking activities also go through Pre-Activity, Main Activity and Post Activity. This lesson design regards listening as a skill when students are asked to do role-play and imitate the speakers in Pre-Activity, the former intended to improve students' Speech Function Skills while the latter, Phonological Skills, which are two of the four key areas of speaking competence for effective communication (Christine C.M. Gob, 2007a). In Listening Exercise Two of Main Activity, the writer plans to allocate a few minutes for students to do group discussion before asking them to give their answers in class, which promotes cooperative learning and helps build students' language competence in a low anxiety setting (Krashen, 2003). The same is true with all the other pair discussions and group discussions in this lesson design as well. The writer asks students to imitate the speakers in both the Pre-Activity and Post-Activity for incomplete plosion and proper intonation, progression from a search algorithm schema to a direct retrieval schema, which is characterized by Logan in his instance-based theory of learning and development of automaticity (Logan, 1990).

Task-Based group discussion in Post Activity is of great significance to the effectiveness of this lesson design because tasks bear a recognizable relationship to the use of language in the real world (Skehan & Foster, 1999), and thus more meaningful and engaging to students.

4. Conclusion

The paper has had a critical review of one of the popular listening and speaking textbooks in China, New College English Listening and Speaking Course Book I, and designed a two-period listening and speaking lesson mainly for freshmen in universities of China, which have selected this book as a textbook for teachers and students, with sufficient theoretical support. The textbook is the main teaching material in the proposed lesson plan, but in practice, teachers might also replace some parts with materials they find helpful. Students like things outside the textbook. The addition of outside updated students' life closely related material from books, disks or internet could make teaching and learning more effective. After all, EFL teachers need to maintain original and creative in the tide of continuous reform with unpredictable change of textbooks.

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